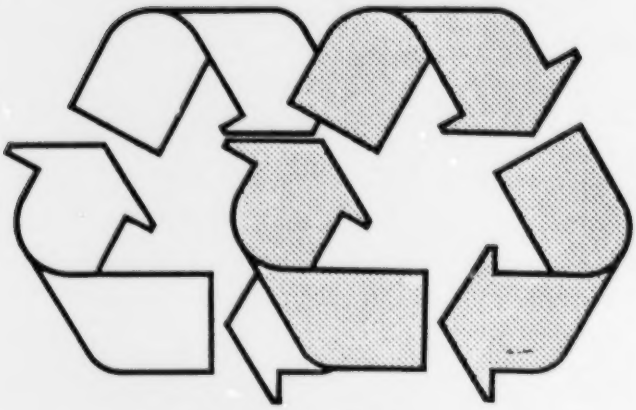
RECYCLING



What you had to say

A Summary of Your Comments at the Open Houses

Manitoba
Environment

Recycling
Action Committee

INTRODUCTION

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During the month of October, 500 Manitobans attended the Recycling Action Committee's eight Open Houses and a series of mini-presentations, held to hear your thoughts and concern about waste reduction and recycling. Many of you had little experience with recycling; others were very involved in their homes, businesses and communities; all of you were genuinely interested in doing what you can to protect the environment. While each Open House had its own concern and character, they shared one commonality: every Open House was thought provoking and worthwhile for the committee members and, we hope, for you, too.

The Recycling Action Committee was created and appointed by the Minister of Environment, the Hon. Glen Cummings, to develop a recycling strategy for Manitoba for the 1990's. The Province has a stated objective of reducing solid wastes by 50 percent by the Year 2000. The recycling strategy will play a key role in achieving that goal, and your input during the Open Houses will be important as the committee develops its recommendations for the Minister.

This report provides a synopsis of your comments at the Open Houses. It is intentionally brief, to allow you to appreciate the flavor of the Open Houses. While this report marks the end of the open house phase of the Recycling Action Committee's work, it also marks the beginning of another phase, the committee's recycling conference.

The conference, entitled Conserving Our Future: A Recycling Strategy for the 90's, will enable you to review the committee's draft recycling action plan and to have another opportunity to influence the committee before it concludes its final plan. A copy of the draft recycling action plan will be mailed to you approximately two weeks prior to the conference. The conference, on March 9 and 10, will include an overview and critique of the draft plan, along with workshops and an exposition of recycling products and processes. Along with providing you another opportunity to help the committee develop its final recommendations, it should be very informative and educational.

Following the conference, the committee will prepare the final draft of its recycling strategy and present it to the Minister of Environment by June, 1990, in time for an announcement during Environment Week.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Robert Fenton (Committee Chairperson), Department of Economics, University of Winnipeg.

Jerry Spiegel, Director, Planning Research and Evaluation, Manitoba Environment.

John Amor, Packaging Association of Canada.

Joyce Agar, Westman Wilderness Society.

John Barker, Manitoba Eco-Network.

Stuart Clark, Mennonite Central Committee.

Jim Ferguson, Recycling Council of Manitoba.

David G. Henderson, Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce.

Jenny Hillard, Consumers Association of Canada.

Tony Kuluk, City of Winnipeg.

Jack Lazareck, Canadian Association of Recycling Industries.

Lance Morrison, Manitoba Soft Drink Recycling

Dr. Ian Rollo, Manitoba Environmental Council.

Dave Shefford, Thompson Industrial Commission.

Mayor Henry Wiebe, Manitoba Association of Urban Municipalities.

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Waste reduction

Before we even talk about recycling, let's talk about reducing the amount of resources we consume and the wastes that we produce. As we travelled around the province, excess packaging and newspaper were two of the items high among people's concerns. The following are some of your concerns about waste reduction.

•Isn't waste reduction the most important issue?

•Why isn't government doing more on this?

•Are we ignoring the role of the producer of excess waste?

•What can we do about excess packaging, such as toothpaste which comes in a tube which is inside a box?

•Do any fast-food outlets provide re-usable plates and cutlery for eat-in meals?

•What can consumers do to influence manufacturers to reduce waste?

•What can be done to educate consumers about packaging?

•Papers drew particular concern.

Alternative products

One person arrived at an Open House with a rip-stop nylon shopping bag designed to fit the plastic bag holders at supermarkets. Along with a general interest in what recycled goods such as used motor oil are available in Manitoba, the re-usable shopping bag was just one example of the many products you had in mind as alternatives to those on store shelves today:

•Speaking on shopping bags, there was a concern about hygiene in re-using plastic grocery bags.

•While paper bags may be viewed as an alternative to plastics, one Open House wondered which required the most energy to produce.

• Another issue raised at an Open House was bio-degradability of packaging, as an alternative to recycling.

•Remember glass milk containers? The question was posed, why don't we return to returnable milk bottles?

•Disposable diapers received attention, and not just for their bulk and longevity in the waste stream. There was also the question of sewage and health concerns in our landfills.

•Many communities do not have diaper services, but the growing environmental awareness may make them economic.

•The problem of litter was added to the other problems associated with disposable products.

•What is the feasibility of recycled products such as glassphalt, rubber asphalt, and plastic asphalt?

Paper and newspapers

Papers contribute significantly to the waste stream, and they also contributed significantly as a topic of discussion at the Open Houses. While all papers drew concern, newspapers attracted particular attention. Then there was the ultimate question in regards to paper: How can we reduce demand for everything printed on paper? Here are more of your comments:

•Many people don't read every section of the newspaper, resulting in the suggestion that people should be able to subscribe on a section-by-section basis.

•A lot of news is printed about the environment, but little of it is being printed on recycled paper. It was suggested that the province's newspapers be encouraged to use recycled newsprint.

•Junk mail and newspaper inserts result in a lot of waste paper.

•What markets exist for waste paper?

•How can we avoid the over-supply of recyclable newspapers that exists in other metropolitan centres?

•How much paper is being recycled in Manitoba?

•Will the investment being made at The Pas create a market for waste paper?

•The committee was told it should voice concern about the lack of recycling capability in the Canadian newsprint industry, even though there is growing legislation in some major markets requiring recycled content.

•Government should set a good example, and one way would be to use recycled paper.

•Even if you want to use recycled paper, it can be difficult to find, prompting someone to ask the Recycling Action Committee if it would act as a central purchasing agent. The committee is well aware of the challenge of finding

recycled paper, but obviously we aren't the only ones using it. According to one Open House, recycled paper for election flyers was no more expensive than regular paper.

•There is a limit to paper recycling, because wood fibre can only be recycled into new paper a limited number of times.

•What's going to happen to the pulp and paper industry as more paper is recycled?

•The educational system is viewed as a major user of paper products, and a potential large market for recycled paper products.

Soft drink containers

The soft drink industry attracted particular attention at the Open Houses. In Manitoba, the Manitoba Soft Drink Recycling Inc. coordinates and operates the industry's recycling efforts. Here are some of the comments and questions you had about this particular segment of the recycling issue.

•MSDR's success is attributable to a number of factors, including the cooperation of mall managers.

•Some people questioned the industry's choice of containers, in particular the decision to move away from reusable glass containers.

•A collection bin beside every dispenser would encourage more recycling.

•Some people would like to see deposits placed on all containers instead of just glass containers.

•Others suggested producers be responsible for all the containers they produce.

Compost

We throw a lot of biodegradables into the waste stream that doesn't belong there. For an example, in the fall, tons of leaves and garden wastes are tossed out. That type of material, plus much of the kitchen leftovers which we throw out, could be made into compost. The compost can be used as soil enhancer and fertilizer. Here are some of your thoughts:

•There were practical questions, such as the length of time needed to compost newspapers.

•Speaking of papers, a few people wondered if toxic materials would leech from some types of papers.

•There were also concerns about other health hazards and rodents which can be associated with improperly-operated composts.

•Some people talked about the merits of individual composters at the home compared to centrally-operated composters. We were told at one Open House that a state-of-the-art composting system for a town of, say, the size of Selkirk would cost about $15,000.

Collection

What do most people think of first when you mention "recycling?" Many think of the collection of recyclable materials. Collection is certainly one of the major elements of any recycling programs, and is often the initial public focus. It was certainly on the minds of people at the Open Houses. Here is what you had to say:

•A blue bag program has begun on a limited basis in Winnipeg, and some people wanted to know if it will be expanding.

•Convenience is certainly an important factor. Others wanted neighborhood drop-off centres and mobile depots, preferably within walking distance.

•Buy-back centres may be one option, but they are also viewed as being awkward. Some people would prefer to donate their recyclables. Perhaps, suggested another, there should be two types of drop-offs, one for donations and one for buy-backs.

•When it came to other provinces, Alberta was one jurisdiction which was used as an example. It was pointed out Alberta pays for a wide range of materials, and there was also the question of why millions of dollars would be required to copy the Alberta system.

•In Britain, glass collection bins can be found in parking lots.

•Rural areas had concerns of their own, including a need for depots. Rural recycling days were referenced at several Open Houses.

•Pesticide containers also pose a collection and disposal issue in rural areas.

•One rural enterprise with 27 drop-off sites, a can crusher, and handicapped workers was held up as an example. It could use help getting its product to market.

Motivators

What will motivate people to recycle? Is it money? How about environmental awareness and, for companies, a good image? At the Open Houses, people suggested those and other factors as motivators for recycling.

•Convenience is certainly one factor.

•Another motivating factor would be to have community groups use recycling as a fund-raising activity.

•Government could introduce economic motivators.

Education

Education was a constant theme, with you telling us the public needs more information on everything from waste reduction, to where to drop off your recyclable goods, to motivators to get more people involved.

•What is being done, and what can be done, to educate people about reducing waste and re-using goods?

•What can be done to educate consumers about packaging, particularly excessive packaging?

•Programs have to be advertised, preferably on electronic media.

•Money saved or earned by recycling could be used for education and advertising.

Markets

We can encourage people to participate in recycling programs. But we must have something to do with all the recyclables which are collected, or else they' ll eventually end up at the waste disposal site.

Many of your questions about markets focussed on particular products:

•What is being done to investigate markets for recyclables?

•Where can we take the following paper products: telephone books, corrugated cardboard, and office papers (including those collected in small towns)?

•What about other products, such as lead batteries, freon and refrigerants?

•Can plastics be recycled cost-effectively?

•Where does all the material from Recycling Days go?

Producer responsibility

Many people attending the Open Houses were concerned about what they could do at their own homes and places of work. But some people want to start further up the chain, as they questioned the responsibility of the producers and asked how they could get business involved in recycling.

•What type of pressure, if any, is being put on manufacturers to take responsibility for their products, including packaging? For an example, how can they be required to take back their cans?

•What would be the inflationary impact if producers were forced to recycle their containers?

•How can the private sector be encouraged or required to organize recycling efforts?

•Should businesses be looking to their associations, such as the Chambers of Commerce, for information and educational support?

•What can consumers do to influence manufactuers?

Fiscal factors

We can't talk about the future of recycling without discussing the economics of recycling. After all, there is a cost to be covered by somebody somehow. Who? How? Government with its regulatory and fiscal powers were uppermost in many peoples' minds. Here are some of your thoughts:

•Is recycling economically feasible?

•Is legislation forthcoming and, if so, what will it cover?

•Is it practical to tax products that are difficult to recycle?

•Products which aren't recycled should be taxed. Taxes might even result in the elimination of undesirable products. The money collected from taxes could be used for recycling projects.

•Taxes could be used to reflect the true cost of products, including handling the product at the end of its useful life. That would give people an incentive to recycle and develop recycling technologies, and cover the cost of a

collection system, as alternatives to the waste stream. The question of who is responsible for the collection system also arose, with two Open Houses supporting municipally operated programs.

•Is the government willing to subsidize recycling products and plants, including paper recycling?

•Another suggestion was to tie a tax on virgin materials to the federal government's proposed GST, with a rebate for recycled goods.

•Not everybody felt comfortable with more government involvement. One person said the private sector, not government, should finance reycling projects. Another was concerned about the administrative cost of collecting taxes. And another feared recycling could become an excuse for another government tax.

•Taxes weren't the only action which people suggested government could take. One Open House suggested irresponsible manufacturers should be fined.

Demand for action

Many people arrived at our Open Houses with a clear commitment to recycling and this message: Give us the tools, and we will do the job. Another person put it this way: "If we don't do something soon, we will be buried in our garbage." Here are some of your comments about how to get the job done:

•Community groups can be more effective than individuals in stating their commitment to reducing waste and to recycling.

•Consumer groups in one town have been successful getting plastic bags removed from stores.

•Government is certainly going to be expected to support recycling in a number of other ways, and at times to take a lead role. Among those were questions about education, standards, staffing to support waste reduction, and what type of support the government would provide for Manitoba mills which would recycle paper.

•The provincial government wasn't the only level of government mentioned. On the federal level, there was concern about the Post Office's pricing for flyers. At the municipal level, there was the suggestion that city council be bombarded with recycling projects.

References to and suggestions for government action are made throughout this summary; in particular, check the section entitled Fiscal Measures.

RAC's mandate

What is the Recycling Action Committee all about? We were asked that wherever we went. In one sentence, we've been appointed by the Minister of Environment to develop a recycling strategy for Manitoba for the 1990's. But that brief explanation left questions and concerns unanswered. Here are some of them:

•How broad is RAC's mandate and does it have the encouragement, resources and support to do the job?

•Is education part of RAC's mandate?

•Who has the mandate to identify and label products as environmentally friendly or unfriendly?

•Does the committee have the mandate to legislate the use of recycling?

•Rural issues can differ from urban issues; RAC was reminded to pay attention to both. While job creation is an issue everywhere, it was raised as prominent concern in rural areas.

•Finally, there was one message which was expressed clearly on several occasions: RAC should not be a public relations committee for the government. (We can promise that we certainly are not that; the proof will be in our recommendations. Of course, you can get a preview of those recommendations in our Draft Report, which will be available prior to our Recycling Conference in March.)

Sustainable development

Recycling is tied irrevocably to the environment and our future. As one person somberly put it, "If we want a clean world to die in, we have to change." In fact, you had a lot to say about recycling and sustainable development, such as, "Our sin of greed is exceeded only by our sin of 'I don't care'." Here are more of your comments:

•Where do recycling and sustainable development dovetail?

•We must consider not just the costs in the short term, but also the long-term consequences if we don't recycle.

•Recycling is a small part of the solution. It's attitudes that must change.

•"For the sake of convenience, we have created a monster. If the (recycling) start up costs are high, so be it. The end result is still worth it."